Home Life on Early Ranches of Southwest Texas

CHAPTER XV

Peter Fagan
Refugio County

By MYRTLE MURRAY
District Agent, Extension Service
College Station, Texas

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SINCE Peter Fagan's father, Nicholas Fagan, landed at Capano in 1829, an important early Texas port on the Coast of Texas in Refugio county, the name *Fagan* has been definitely identified with the development of that section of the State.

Nicolas Fagan, a blacksmith by trade, was born in Cork, Ireland. He and his first wife, Kate Connally Fagan, left the Emerald Isle because of oppressed conditions, landing in New York City in 1816. They lived in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati and St. Louis, finally arriving in New Orleans. There Mrs. Fagan died, leaving three small children. Then Mr. Fagan married Catherine Hansellman-Balch, a beautiful cultured woman.

Because of a desire to better his conditions and a thirst for adventure he came to Texas, bringing his second wife and his three children. He received a league of land for himself and one-fourth league for each of his sons as a grant from the Mexican Government. The title for this grant was issued September 22, 1834.

A two-story house made of hand-hewn logs was constructed. The floor came from a Spanish barkentine which had been driven ashore. Mrs. Fagan set about making a home, doing the many things that pioneer women of that period did, and keeping an ever watchful eye on the children. She never knew what minute they might be attacked by the Indians. Her children never were. But Mr. and Mrs. Gilliland, one of the neighbors were massacred and their two children taken captive.

Mr. Fagan was a member of the party that assisted in the rescue of these children. He became a noted scout during the Texas-Mexican War and was a close friend of Deaf Smith's. He was captured with Colonel J. W. Fannin's command. While imprisoned he was saved from execution by neighboring Mexicans whom he had befriended before the war.

The Peter Fagan home in Refugio county. In the foreground from left to right are Oscar Fagan, Lucas DuBois (Mrs. Fagan's brother), Peter Fagan and Mrs. Peter Fagan.

So during this time when rugged individualism was a dominant and much admired trait of character, Peter Fagan, christened Patrick Henry, was born on May 6, 1843.

Young Peter grew up knowing how necessary it was to be on the watch for the Indians. Hunting to kill game for food and for sport, he became an expert marksman long before he was grown. He and his brothers and sisters knew where the good swimming holes were, where the wild grapes grew. They knew the names of the wild animals, their haunts, the ones to be feared, and the ones to be admired at a distance. They played over the prairies which were adorned with myriads of wild flowers in season of every size and hue, the delicate, gay and gaudy intermingled in delightful confusion. According to educational opportunities of today one might say they were "innocent of books," but, "were rich in lore of field and brooks." And they were taught to make an honest living.

When the Civil War started it was natural that Peter would respond to his State's call.

He enlisted in Company C, 4th Texas Cavalry, Sibley Brigade, a youth of 18. He served with Sibley throughout the war in the New Mexico campaign and participated in the battle of Glorietta near Santa Fe, the battles of Val Verde, Paralto and other skirmishes. After having completed their mission the long march home began. Their horses gave out. They had to walk much of the way from El Paso to San Antonio, their food consisting of wild game which they cooked and ate without salt.

"I declared I would never be without a horse again," he frequently remarked in thinking of that march in later years.

The life of the pioneer in those days was hard, especially for the children. And Peter Fagan's experiences in the mountains of New Mexico were anything but easy. Along with other young men at that time Mr. Fagan returned home to realize that the building of a country during reconstruction was probably the greatest challenge of all; that each day's responsibilities had to be met with courage and determination against almost insurmountable obstacles.

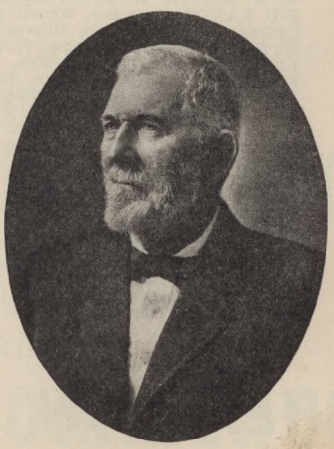
On October 15, 1868, he married Laura DuBois, daughter of Lucas DuBois, a member of the company with which Mr. Fagan served in the Civil War. The Lucas DuBois family had come from Louisiana to Saluria, Matagorda Island, in 1840. Their livestock having been stolen during the war, they moved to Hines Bay where Mr. DuBois could engage in stock raising and farming.

Peter and Laura Fagan started housekeeping on the San Antonio River, just a few hundred yards from where he was born. He inherited land from his father and he already had a good start of livestock.

They built a two-room house with an "L" extending back for a dining room and kitchen. It was comfortably furnished with walnut furniture of that period including lovely teaster bedsteads. Both dry goods and groceries were brought from Victoria, about 40 miles away. There was an abundance of milk and chickens. In season wild plums and berries could be gathered on the prairies and in the bottoms. Wild turkeys roamed everywhere. It was not unusual to see deer in groups numbering from 75 to 100. Mr. Fagan's guns were always in good condition and he could kill a deer running as easily as if it were standing still. A calf or a wild hog could be butchered anytime when needed. Fish could be secured from the river, or from the bay near by.

Mrs. Fagan was busy early and late caring for the three children, Addie, Fred and Oscar. There was cooking to be done, lye to be made from ashes to be used in making the soap, and the washing and ironing. While the equipment was probably the best to be had

MRS. PETER FAGAN



PETER FAGAN

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at that time it was still meager. Ironing was done with sad irons.

"They were *sad* irons, too," recalls Addie, now Mrs. C. C. Smith. "It took me two days to do the family ironing. Everything had to be ironed, including the hose.

"We would often work until midnight dressing ducks and geese after Mr. Fagan and the boys returned from their frequent hunts.

"I was the only girl but I did not let the boys get ahead of me."

Anything the boys or her father thought she could not do was always a challenge to her. She remarked one day that she was going after mulberries.

"You can't get mulberries. The trees are too high for you to climb," her father cautioned. But she got the mulberries.

Mrs. Fagan and Addie were kept busy quilting, sewing and making pillows.

Peter Fagan gradually accumulated large herds of cattle. He sold mostly to local buyers. One time the best he was offered was $5.00 per head. So he and four cowboys drove them to Monterrey, Mexico, where they were sold for $25.00 each. On the way down they camped near a ranch house in a desolate section of the Rio Grande country, miles away from any other sign of habitation. A Mexican woman was there alone, but she gave them permission to camp and get water. On the return trip Mr. Fagan made it a point to camp there again. After supper each man rolled up in his blanket and went to sleep. During the night Mr. Fagan awoke very cold. He decided he would sleep the remainder of the night between the house and the kitchen where he would be protected from the wind. He had his money in a *morales*—a bag made of hemp strings by the Mexicans. Before going to sleep they had seen no one except the Mexican woman, but as Mr. Fagan approached the house he saw probably 20 Mexican men sitting on the floor around the fireplace listening to the Mexican woman talk. Slipping nearer Mr. Fagan heard her telling them how to rob him and insisting she knew he had plenty of money.

"I forgot I was cold," declared Mr. Fagan.

Rushing back to the boys he gave the order, "Get up! And get away! I'll tell you why later!"

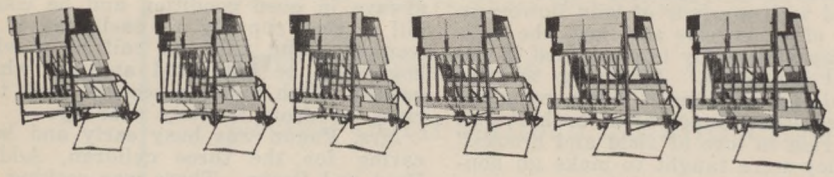
Mr. Fagan had a pair of brown oxen that had never been broken to work. As the party crossed the Rio Grande these oxen disappeared. Later they came back home.

There were no fences, so he usually rounded up his cattle about twice each year and branded the calves. Thomas O'Connor, J. M. O'Brien and Peter Fagan would take care of each other's brands during the roundups.

Mr. Fagan raised and sold horses until 1882. The horses were usually driven to New Orleans or to Kansas City to be sold. He always liked horses after his experience of walking from El Paso to San Antonio just after the Civil War.

He worked cattle and horses from Refugio county to Beeville. He drove large herds of cattle for Thomas O'Connor to Indianola where they were loaded

JOHNSON SQUEEZE GATES



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on the Morgan steamers bound for New Orleans.

He improved the cattle some, but not much, because he thought the Longhorns were hardier. But he liked the fences as wire became available because he could see after his cattle easier, but he did not want to be hemmed in too close. He raised some corn, hay and sorghum for feed.

"I am plowing up the best crop I have," he said when he plowed up mesquite and sage grass on his sandy land.

Just after the Civil War Mr. Fagan came into possession of an old wagon that he used for hauling wood. One very hot day after having loaded the wagon with hardwood he started home. The flies were annoying the oxen. While coming down a bank to cross a ravine they pulled the rope out of his hand. As they started up the opposite bank the wagon tongue came out of the ring in the yoke and dropped to the ground. As Mr. Fagan did not have hold of the rope to guide the oxen they started up the bank and ran the wagon tongue into the ground about four feet and broke the chain. The frightened team of oxen then ran away.

Mr. Fagan walked home, saddled his horse and went after the oxen. He found them about a mile away out on the prairie in a lake. After driving them home he hitched them up again and returned to the creek bank to dig the tongue from out of the side of the bank, and returned home hot and tired. The oxen were also hot and were still being annoyed by horse flies. They were slinging their heads from side to side at a lively rate when Mr. Fagan approached the old broad-horned ox to take the key out of the bow. The ox threw his head around to knock a fly off his back and struck Mr. Fagen with such terrific force that it knocked him flat.

Mr. Fagan was usually very patient with animals. But this in addition to everything else that had happened to him that afternoon was too much, he thought. And being Irish he lost his temper and reached for his ax to kill the ox. Putting his right foot forward to swing the ax with greater force onto the head of the animal just as the ox threw his head in the opposite direction, he missed the ox, but knocked his own big toe nail completely off.

"I forgot I was mad at the ox," laughed Mr. Fagan later, but the pain was so great that it was not funny at the time. His toe was so sore that he had to cut the toe-caps out of his shoes in order to wear them at all. Several days later he limped out to where he had some Mexicans putting in post for a fence. He arrived as a Mexican was tamping a post with a big stick.

"*Esta bueno,*" (it is good) said the Mexican as he set the heavy tamping stick down behind him and right on Mr. Fagan's sore toe. Again Mr. Fagan fell down as quickly as if he had been shot.

"I felt more like killing that Mexican at the moment than I did the ox," Mr. Fagan added when telling the story in later years.

While Mr. Fagan acquired more land, and his herds of cattle grew, Addie, Fred and Oscar were growing up also. In 1883 they converted the orginal house into a two-story house which is still standing, well preserved in the grove of live oaks, wild peach, elm and anaquas that Mr. Fagan planted to protect it.

They had lots of company, according to the children. This is probably one reason why Mrs. Fagan stayed at home so closely, busy from morning until night,

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Don Axtell 16th, grand champion bull at the 1935 Fort Worth Fat Stock Show. He is three quarters brother to Don Axtell 39th, now at the head of the G. P. Mitcham herd at Cisco, that sold in the 1937 Fort Worth Sale for $4,100.

In the Criterion Hereford Sale in Fort Worth on Tuesday, March 14, we will sell a summer yearling heifer by Don Axtell 16th and bred to Donnas Domino that was eighth at Denver; a senior yearling heifer, sixth at Denver, by Young Superior and bred to Don Axtell 16th; a junior yearling bull by Donnas Domino and out of a Young Axtell dam. He was in the money at Denver.

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but ever ready to help nurse the sick.

There was a country doctor near who did "pretty well." But in case of serious sickness they tried to secure a doctor from Victoria.

A school teacher was employed to teach the children in the home while they were small. Later Addie attended the convent in Victoria and the boys went to school at St. Mary's in San Antonio.

As the children grew older the boys spent much of the time riding. A favorite Sunday afternoon sport was to saddle the horses, ride out of sight of home and rope yearlings. The priest frequently said Mass in their home, after which Fred would slip out and go hunting. Members of the family insisted it was not the right thing for him to do on Sunday. One time he had slipped out to the woods with his gun and came upon a panther. The panther raised his ears just as Fred stepped behind a tree and shot. Rushing to the house for assistance he met his brother. They returned to the dead panther and found that it had killed a deer near by and had covered it with leaves. The entire family rejoiced with Fred's success, even though he had hunted on Sunday morning.

Other home recreation included playing cards and dominoes; if they were not reading.

"We read the *Victoria Advocate*, the *Galveston News*, other newspapers and school books," the children remember.

Mr. Fagan played the violin or *fiddle*. He could not whistle or sing, but he could "make music" on the fiddle. Some of the children's favorite tunes he played were "Dixie" and "Natchez Under the Hill."

They attended the dances where they danced the schottische, waltz, and the old square dance.

"I have ridden horse-back 30 miles to a dance and danced from sun-down until sun-up," Mrs. Smith relates.

Supper was usually served at midnight and consisted of baked turkey, chicken, venison and other meats, and cakes and pies and coffee.

"I usually took a cake," said Mrs. Smith.

"No, I did not meet my husband at a dance," she answered my question. "He came to fix a windmill. I saw him from upstairs through a field glass. I declared then I would never stop until I got him."

Mrs. Fagan was very hospitable. She knew what Mr. Smith was going to tell her when he came to ask for her daughter.

"Won't you have a cup of coffee?" she inquired cordially. Her son-in-law was always very fond of her and still talks about what good biscuits she made. Mrs. Fagan was an excellent housekeeper. And as one looks at it, standing so white among the trees that have protected it for 70 years, he feels the house has always been spotless.

Through the trees one can see the big bridge that spans the San Antonio River near by. Originally this was the "toll bridge" that spanned the Guadalupe River near Victoria. When the new bridge was built Mr. Fagan bought the old one and placed it over the San Antonio River to drive his cattle to the "island," or prairie. "The island" is the piece of land between the old bed of the San Antonio River and the present bed, the old river having filled up, then cut around through a ditch to form the present river bed.

On a high knoll between the house and the bridge, and to the back, stands a beautiful mausoleum of Colorado marble in which rest the remains of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Fagan. He bought the marble several years before his death, September 1, 1929. Mrs. Fagan died in 1930.

"I want to be buried on top of the ground, so a plow can never run over me," he requested.

The mausoleum was constructed large enough to inter himself and his wife, his daughter and her husband, his two sons and their wives. Mr. Fagan bought the marble and had it shipped before telling the children about it. They, however, helped put it up.

Mr. Fagan bought metallic coffins for himself and his wife several years before their death.

He also selected the inscription for the mausoleum and had that engraved before his death. It is: "All that man has when he comes to die is what he has given away."

All three of the children are living. They are Adelade ("Addie"), who married C. C. Smith and lives at Odem, San Patricio county; Oscar, lives in the house that his father and mother built; Fred and his wife live on the ranch nearby. Much of the original grant of land is still in the possession of the family.

Feeders at the Denver Show averaged $12 cwt. on 85 loads. Ten cars of prize calves average $16.75 with a top of $20.00. Ten cars of prize yearling steers averaged $11.17 with a top of $13.00, and 65 cars of non-prize feeder calves and yearlings averaged $11.40. In neither division did the high bid go to the load judged grand champion. Buyers were mostly from Iowa and Illinois.

8. THE CORRECT HUNTING SIGHT.

By MONROE H. GOODE, *An Experienced Big Game Hunter and Recognized Shooting Authority*

THERE are three types of rifle sights: Open, aperture (peep), and telescopic. Open sights are less accurate than any other type; aperture sights are far better than the open variety; and telescopic sights are greatly superior to all others.

OPEN SIGHTS—The best form of open sight is the flat-top bar with a shallow "U" notch. All open sights are more or less obsolete except for snap shooting at very short range or for young eyes. Every hunter must as age approaches choose aperture or telescopic sights, and the earlier in life he does so, the better.

FRONT SIGHT — The essential points of front sights for game shooting are visibility, accuracy, and strength. The best front sights for use with either open or aperture rear sights are the regular bead made of copper alloy, politely called "gold," and the ever popular ivory bead.

Ivory does not show up well against white backgrounds, such as snow, and should be avoided in cold climates. Other objections are that it is very fragile and even with the best of care frequent breaks occur. Ivory sights do not shoot away from the light to as great extent as do gold bead sights, but they are worthless for target shooting and turn yellow when old or saturated with oil.

Gold bead sights are best for all-around use in all climates. They are sturdier than ivory sights and can be blackened for informal target shooting.

Flat-faced beads are more accurate than convex beads, since the light is more evenly reflected from the entire surface of the bead. However, convex beads can be seen in poorer light than flat-faced ones. For accuracy, the flat-faced is better; for extremely poor light or fast shooting, the convex.

The three general sizes of beads are fine (1/16), medium (5/64), and coarse (3/32). Long barrels call for larger front sights than short barrels. Fine beads are best for deliberate, long-range shooting, while large beads are best for fast or short-range shooting.

Aperture rear hunting sights should be mounted on the receiver. Tang sights may be countenanced on .22 caliber rifles, but never on rifles developing considerable recoil, as there is grave danger of injury to the eye.

For hunting, the aperture should be very large, as aim can be caught more quickly in all kinds of light. For frequent sight changes or different brands of cartridge or loads, the micrometer variety is superior. It can be adjusted for various ranges or different loads with the minimum expenditure of ammunition. The open rear sight should not be used with an aperture sight.

Telescopic hunting sights are divided into two types: low-priced instruments for rifles of light recoil, such as .22 rim fire and .22 Hornet, and expensive ones for use on high-power big-game rifles.

For average big-game hunting, the power of the instrument should be 2-1/4X to 4X, the lowest power which will do the job being preferable. For quick shooting at average ranges, the power should be 3X or under; for long-range shooting, 4X. High-powered scopes show more detail or show to better advantage small objects at long range because of higher magnification, provided the light-transmitting power is relatively as high as that of the lower power. High power means a smaller field, increased unsteadiness, and greater bulk, weight, and cost.

Reticules should be either the medium cross hairs or the blunted picket post, depending upon personal preference.

NUMBER EIGHT OF A SERIES

Eastern New Mexico Hereford Breeders Have Good Sale

The Eastern New Mexico Hereford Breeders Association had one of the fastest and best sales of the season at Roswell on January 27, when they sold 58 head for an average of $185. The 50 bulls returned $191 per head and the eight females, $145. The top price of $410 was paid for Superior Domino by Mike Nalda, Vaughn, New Mexico. This was a five-year-old son of Super Superior 7th, consigned by N. H. French, Elida, New Mexico. W. E. Betts, Clovis, New Mexico, paid $400 for a four-year-old son of New Prince Domino from the A. L. French consignment and L. T. Lewis, Roswell, New Mexico, took a son of New Prince Domino 10th from the same herd at $350. Mike Nalda also paid $325 for a bull consigned by A. D. Jones, Roswell, and W. R. Shattuck, El Paso Gap, New Mexico, took a good calf at $315 from the G. L. Williams herd at Artesia, New Mexico. J. P. White Co., Roswell, purchased 18 bulls in the auction and paid $300 for a bull from the N. H. French herd. They also topped the females by paying $250 for a heifer from the same herd.

It was by far the best offering this organization has presented and the breeders are to be congratulated on the progress they are making.

Those having cattle in the auction, besides the breeders already mentioned, were Austin Reeves, Hope; John Easley, Lovington; and W. E. Betts, Clovis.

Among the other purchasers (all from New Mexico unless otherwise shown) were W. E. Mathers, Cap Rock; J. B. Armstrong, Roswell; B. B. Thurman, Hatch; W. S. Martin, Duran; Gilbert Peters, Nogales, Ariz.; Joe Wilcox, Kenna; E. L. Newsom, Loving; A. P. Graham, Hillsboro; John Dearing, Elida; Jersy Harrell, Roswell; Sam Hughes, El Paso Gap; Herbert Joyce, Roswell; Pete Carter, Roswell; R. L. Corn, Roswell; Donald Fanning, Artesia; Ed Wright, Ft. Sumner; J. L. Prude, Hope; A. P. Evans, Hagerman; J. P. Andrews, Hagerman; Gerald Tully, Glencoe, and W. C. Wyatt, Roswell.

The sale was handled by Col. Earl Gartin and the newspaper representatives.

Jack Turner, secretary of the Texas Hereford Assn., is authority for the statement that the Criterion Sale, which will be held on Tuesday, March 14, during the Fort Worth Fat Stock Show, will be one of extremely high quality. The 60 best cattle will be chosen from the total list of entries and only that many will be sold. Most of the show herds have made entries and numerous others will also try for a place in the auction.

The Texas Polled Hereford auction will be held on Wednesday, March 15, in the Fat Stock Show sale pavilion, following the judging of this breed that morning. Secretary Dewey Martin says that there will not be as many cattle as usual but that the quality will be far above that seen in previous sales here.

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